

A Trans Popstar's World

When Life Dreams and Being Transgender Collide

A novel by Talaine Mare

Copyright (c) 2014 Talaine Mare. All rights reserved.

This work has been released under a creative commons licence (CC BY-NC-ND) under some circumstances, including for online archives.

Important Information

This book is about a trans perspective on various social issues trans people often face. It is written for both trans people and other people interested in learning about trans lives. It is based on the author's own experiences as well as the many stories of real life trans people she has come across over many years.

There were three aims in the writing of this book: to provide a picture of what trans lives are really like to interested non-trans people, to stimulate discussion in the trans community on some important issues we face, and to hopefully inspire some trans people to think about these issues.

Of course, not every trans person wants to be a pop star (actually the title is supposed to be tongue in cheek). However, the issues dealt with in the book are equally applicable to trans people wanting to pursue their dreams in a wide variety of life settings.

It is important to note that this book does not deal with some aspects of trans lives, including the medical aspects. The author believes that this is appropriate for two reasons. Firstly, this book is not written from a medical perspective and it is inappropriate to include 'unprofessional' medical advice. Secondly, there are many resources out there dealing with those aspects already. In fact, there is often an over-emphasis on the medical aspects of transition, distracting from the social issues of trans lives. This book hopes to provide a purely social side narrative of a trans life, something really too rare out there.

Although this novel is inspired by the experiences of the author, besides the main character (Katie Greenlight), who is partially based on the author, no other character is based on any real life person, and any resemblance is co-incidental. In particular, characters associated with transgenderism and characters associated with the quarter life crisis are based on general ideas of those experiences, and are not in any way related to the actual life of any specific real life individual. The events in the book are also wholly fictional, including all conversations and all material 'found on the internet', for example the stories about living in stealth.

More About The Author

The author is a singer-songwriter and has also written several other books, under the name TaraElla. She has based the idea of the book around her own experiences in part.

About The Music In The Book

The music in the book can be found on the book website, <http://atranspopstarsworld.blogspot.com/>.

It can also be downloaded in a specifically released companion album, Some Life Dreams EP by TaraElla, also available on the website.

Chapter 1. THE REAWAKENING OF DREAMS

I probably should start off by introducing myself. My name is Katie Greenlight and I am 18 years old. I am also trans - also known as 'transgender' more formally, but I prefer the short form as it is easier to say. That is, when I was born, people thought that I was a boy, and for the first 16 years of my life I was treated as such. However, I had always knew that this was wrong, and shortly after my 16th birthday I told everyone who knew me about the real me. Of course, I changed the way I looked too. It's next to impossible to get people to think of you as a girl if you look like a boy, right?

Fortunately, my family has been supportive. The first few months were rough, because my parents didn't even know what being trans meant, or that it was possible for someone to

feel that way. Their only previous exposure to anything remotely similar was drag queens. Their first concern was indeed that I would 'look like a drag queen', and looking like that 24/7 'probably wasn't the best way to present'. Whilst I totally respect drag queens and love a good drag show, being trans is a totally different thing. Drag is a show, but my life is not. Well, sometimes it is, but a lot of the time it's not. Consequently, I don't go out looking all glamorous like a drag queen all the time, for example. Anyway, what I was saying is that coming out as trans presented its own unique challenges. Whilst unless you have been living under a rock there is no confusion as to what being 'gay', 'lesbian' or 'bisexual' means, 'trans' is still a unknown and misunderstood topic to many people.

With a relatively supportive environment, I was able to go 'full time' just before my 17th birthday. What 'full time' means is simple -

essentially it just means that I started presenting as myself 24/7, not going back to pretending to be a boy anymore. And whilst you could probably start doing so a week after you tell everyone, it's probably not the best idea. People need time to get used to the changes, and you need time to get 'passable' - which just means that you look like a normal girl and people don't stare when you go out. Working on your presentation for some time can really help in that area.

Since then, life has definitely been much better than before, at least in some ways. I graduated from high school and started college. Here, most people don't know that I am trans at all. A few friends who came from my high school, as well as a few people that I have told, do know, but they wouldn't be so impolite as to make it an issue or tell random people. The college administration probably knows too, but they don't really care, seeing that there are about

30,000 students on campus, right? Therefore, my life has been 'mostly normal'.

But then, there's something not quite normal. Something is missing. A life force that I used to have, I don't have anymore. It seems that nothing feels really wrong, but things aren't entirely right either. And without this life force, things don't function properly. For example, I have been lacking exercise recently, because I feel less motivated to do it. Consequently, I have put on about 20 pounds over the last year. I am still figuring out a way to make myself lose all of that.

Don't get me wrong, I'm much happier now. It's just that I am still missing something, and not quite knowing how to fix it yet.

In order to understand where you are at, sometimes it's best to reach into the past. I am a musical person, so my favorite way of doing this is by listening to old music. You know, the tunes I used to listen to again and again in years past, until they have soaked up all the memories of those times.

Nostalgia is a great feeling usually. But recently, it has been getting so overwhelming for me. Some days I literally cannot sleep. I surely don't miss being a boy, but I do miss something from the past, it appears.

I could try using even more nostalgia to cure this unusually strong nostalgia, I thought. So I went looking for lists of old music online. And that's how I came across the large community of people who were struggling with a 'quarter

life crisis' online. Whilst I am not even 20 yet, and people only generally get a 'quarter life crisis' around 25 or so, a lot of the things they said really resonated with me. Could I be having a 'quarter life crisis' at 18? It appears unlikely statistically, even though the youngest person on the forums I have come across was only 20. However, I am sure that I am going through something a bit similar, even if only superficially.

I think I will try to read more of these 'quarter life crisis' writings. It may help me find my direction. After all, the quarter life crisis is all about finding out what you want in life, and finding a way to get there, which seems to closely match what I need now.

I am listening to so much old music these few weeks, as a result of all the lists I have been reading on the internet. Nostalgia is a big thing everywhere, it seems.

Everybody has a favorite song, it seems. Mine is The Climb by Miley Cyrus. Maybe it's because of the time it was released. It was everywhere during my middle school graduation. And that time was magical for me.

Part of that magic was in how I envisioned the future. I used to dream that I could be a cultural icon. I also wanted to be a singer, as part of that dream. Sadly, it was only a dream. Although all my life I have lived with this trans thing, it was during high school that things got really bad. I started to get really depressed, because I felt like I was missing out on life. It was time that I knew I could never get back. On the other hand,

I lacked the courage to do something about it, until about two years ago.

Speaking of 'missing out', looking back, I really missed out on a lot of 'life'. If I had to write a list of things that I missed out on and can never have back, I really wouldn't know where to start, and how long it would take. When I was 6, the main things on the list would be dressing as a princess at parties and having dolls to play with. But so many more important things have passed me by since then.

Now that the trans 'problem' has been dealt with, you would think I would be able to move forward with whatever dreams I may have had. That all the 'missing out' would be over. Sadly, it's not so simple. Being trans means that I lack confidence. If my friends found out, would they desert me? If I start dating, when my boyfriend finds out, will he leave? More scarily, will he

become violent? It's fears like these that prevent me from doing many things these days. So life is better, but things still just pass me by. Will things improve? I don't know.

Today I read something very inspiring on a 'quarter life crisis' website.

"Quarter Lifers are truly at a crossroads when it comes to their dreams and aspirations. Although they are told to give it up in various not so subtle ways, part of them wants to hang on. They often try to be more 'practical' with their outlook in life, but then they really don't feel like doing that after all. Often it is trying to force themselves to be 'practical' and stop chasing their dreams that trigger a full blown quarter life crisis.

Often, the very 'choices' to be made in a quarter life crisis have something to do with continuing to chase your dreams vs completely stopping doing that altogether. If you are having or have had a quarter life crisis, examine the life choices you are having difficulty with. There's a good chance that they relate to this very idea. In fact, I believe this basic conflict is at the centre of most of the dilemmas arising out of a quarter life crisis.

Many 20-somethings and 30-somethings have reported that they feel LESS happy than when they were younger. It's not like life was any easier back then, either. Sure, you had your parents looking after your every need, you didn't have to deal with exorbitant bills that threaten to put you into debt all the time, you probably got away with working less hard than you do now, but then there were bullies and the

cool groups vs outcasts problem everywhere, your finances were controlled by your parents and you basically had no freedom at all. Some of you also had to deal with teachers you didn't like, who may be no less difficult than the boss you have now.

So what was different? What made back then more tolerable than right now? I've tried to answer this question for many years, and the one thing it comes down to is what I call the vista of youth. The vista of youth is endless hope, endless possibilities, and a space wide enough to hold the wildest dreams. Whilst being in high school was no fun for many people, the vista of hope kept them alive. Sadly, this vista has often been eroded quite badly by the time people reach their late-20s or their 30s. By this time, they have seen other people get ahead whilst they are languishing in failure land, chalking up failure after failure. By this time, the media driven culture has effectively

made it clear that they are too old to be cool. All this combines to make that dream seem all that more impossible than it once seemed.

But all those things are illusions. The truth is that in your 20s and 30s, you are still on your way down the long road to chase down your dreams. If at this time you lose the vista of youth, and therefore lose the youthful spirit it brings to your life, you lose the will to travel on and fight on, like a soldier who loses their will to carry on in a battlefield, who just falls to the ground and die right there. Isn't that sad? If you don't want that to happen to you, you must fight to keep your vista of youth fresh all the time until you reach your destination in life. Next we will talk about how to do just that."

That really got me thinking. If being 30 means you still have plenty of time to chase your

dreams, then it would be very sad to give up at 18 indeed.

Just thinking about it gave me a familiar good feeling, something that I haven't had for years. Maybe this is what I am missing - the ability to dream. It had been washed out of me from the past several years of difficulties. It had been washed out of me because I believed that being trans prevented me from chasing my dreams. But what if it's all an 'illusion'?

I really need to think about this more.

Chapter 2. REVISITING MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

Inspired by the possibility that the spirit of dreaming may be able to be revived in my life, I set out to explore the idea more. What really prevented me from going for my dreams? Why have I not even think about them in recent years? And can I really revive them now?

I guess it would be a great question to ask other trans people. But most trans people on the trans forums I visit are in the most difficult 'actively transitioning' phase in their lives. That is, they often look between male and female, and are having to deal with family and friends not yet used to their new situation, and therefore have a very difficult life. For them, 'living the dream' means just what I am doing - living a normal life and putting all that behind

them. Once you get there and have settled down for a while, you will find that something is missing. But I guess most of the people on the forums aren't there yet, and it's probably not useful to explore this idea with them.

Therefore, I decided to instead raise the question on a forum for people dealing with quarter life crises. They like to think about stuff like this a lot, after all. And it appears that there are really many broken dreams out there.

"I wanted to be an actress. But my Asian parents thought that it wasn't a professional career. I even offered to go to college first, but they still weren't supportive. So I had to give up on my dream," Jenny wrote.

"I wanted to be a politician, starting from student politics. But my friends thought that it

was uncool. I even approached the campus Democrats, wanting to join, but ultimately decided against it, because I would become an outcast amongst my friends. My friends are all anti-authority cynical types, and they would have given me a hard time for it. I was scared, I guess," Tim wrote.

It appears that it is often our environment that has forced us to give up on our dreams. But why?

At that moment, I saw that Jenny had come online, and I decided to initiate a chat.

"Thanks for sharing your story with me," I started typing. "Does it still hurt to have given up on that dream?"

"No, not really. I don't care about it anymore," she replied.

"I don't know if it is appropriate for me to ask you something," I typed.

"Go ahead. I am open to any questions," she replied.

"Since you were already an adult in college, couldn't you just defy your family?" I asked.

There was a pause.

"It's not easy. Asians don't do that," she replied.

"And what would happen if you did it?" I asked.

"I don't know. But there may have been lots of trouble," she replied.

"Could you just have a talk with your family about it," I asked.

"I did, when I was 16. They didn't react nicely," she replied.

"And how about later on?" I asked.

"I guess I was scared about what they would say. Thinking about it, it was easier to give up than to face that fear. But years later, when we revisited the topic, my parents actually said they would have respected my decision when I was over 21," she replied.

At that moment, it struck me. It was fear that prevented us from moving forward with our dreams. And it's often irrational fear that had no basis in reality.

I then realised that it was also fear that was preventing me from accessing my dreams again. I feared that by being exposed as a trans person publicly, life would become hell. People would treat me like a circus freak rather than the normal young woman I am. I feared that if I went ahead with my chosen career, the media would paint me as this sensationalised freakish

person, and I just cannot live with being seen like that.

I also realised that whilst being trans may be a specific experience with its own territory, there are many things that people living vastly different lives share, like the struggle between dreams and fear, and the struggle between choosing to pursue your dreams and settling for an ultimately unsatisfactory life. Trans people experience this life crisis in a trans context, but ultimately it is similar to how other people experience it in many ways.

I have made my decision. I am going to re-embrace my dreams. I am going to revive my music career, and see where I can take it.

I do still have the same fears as I had before. But I guess I just have to face them, and deal

with them. And find a way to deal with the underlying issues satisfactorily.

Just saying all this out loud is very empowering indeed.

Determined to revive my music career, I took out some of the music I wrote a few years ago but has since been sitting in a corner of my top drawer gathering dust. And I came across something that really inspired me. I started to sing it out loud.

[This music can be found on the companion album. The name of the track is The Road To Where I Am Heading.]

Sitting here, looking at this photo album
It brings back so many memories
Sometimes I wish they would come alive again
And I could just jump into it
Sometimes, today seems sad
Compared to back then when everything
seemed alright
But I know we need to keep moving on

It's a long road to where I'm heading
Half of the road has been travelled
So much has been seen
It's a long way my dreams will take me
I don't know where or when the next

Adventure will be

It's a long road to where I'm heading

Half of the road is still unknown

So much still to do

But I know it will be worth

Every day, every sacrifice

Cause where the dreams are

Is where I belong

In the, darker times, I need some courage

One thing I do is to look back

Seeing those memories and dreams that inspire

I feel so refreshed again

And then I get the strength, to

Look at the future and say here I come
There's a long way ahead I'll keep, moving on

It's a long road to where I'm heading
Half of the road has been travelled
So much has been seen
It's a long way my dreams will take me
I don't know where or when the next
Adventure will be

It's a long road to where I'm heading
Half of the road is still unknown
So much still to do
But I know it will be worth
Every day, every sacrifice

Cause where the dreams are

Is where I belong.

Chapter 3. WHAT'S IN A NAME

As I said before, my name is Katie Greenlight. My full name is actually Katie Rose Greenlight. It's on my birth certificate, and it's also on all of my other documents. But it isn't the name I was born with. You see, as people thought I was a boy when I was born, I was given a boy's name. But living as a girl with a boy's name isn't exactly the easiest life. I really don't know why names have to be gendered, but as they are, it's just one thing that we have to live with, I guess. And the best way to live with that was to change my name.

Changing your name is a weird and unique experience. Most people don't get to do it. In fact, some trans people have said that a unique gift of being trans is the ability to choose your own name. As to how this name is chosen,

everyone has their own unique story. For me, Katie was a name somebody in my kindergarten class had. She was someone I sort of admired, although we were never really friends. Katie Rose also fit with my previous initials, giving me some continuity, so it didn't feel like I was losing my past.

Having finally decided on your name is a really empowering thing. You finally have an identity that is you, and that is complete. But the process of actually changing it legally is quite a hassle. Depending on where you live, you may have to go to a lawyer or even go to court. I have even heard of unsympathetic judges making things difficult for people in courts. Luckily, where I was born you only need to go to a registry office to get everything sorted. Once this is done, however, you have to go around to various government departments and organisations to change everything that has your name on it.

The reason why I am revisiting all this is because I am deciding whether to change my name again. Not literally, I am happy with my name now - but whether to have an artist name different from my real name for my music career. When I was living as a boy, it was something I decided that I would definitely do, because I didn't identify with the boy name. Now? I am not so sure. But I guess the best way to find out would be to try and pick an artist name.

What should my artist name be? I have no idea. So I decided to raise the idea with my friend Jayne, who I met for lunch today. I first met Jayne in a youth support group. She was a strong ally of gay and trans people, which she

attributes to being raised by two loving moms, whose stories of struggle to get their relationship accepted back in the 1980s and 90s inspired her to reach out and help others in similar situations, although she herself turned out totally straight. Jayne is really friendly and easy to talk to, and is one of those people who almost everyone admires, because they have such confidence about their own lives that they have plenty of it left over to share with other people in need of a confidence boost.

"Your name should be something that represents the real you," Jayne said.

"I am just a normal young woman, I guess. I am not like, someone like Lady Gaga, for example," I said.

"Then maybe you should have a name that reflects that," Jayne said.

It's been a week, and I still haven't been able to decide on an artist name. I knew just the place to get some inspiration: trans forums. People talk about names there all the time.

And I was in luck. There was an active discussion on how everyone chose their name. So I read on.

"As a way of dealing with gender discomfort, I invented an alter-ego from an early age. I called her Renee, after the main character in my favorite book at the time. Renee came to have an email address and various internet profiles when I grew older. Later, I realised that I was living through Renee - that the real me was Renee. So I just changed my name to Renee," Renee wrote.

"I am an only child, but I was supposed to have a twin sister. Sadly, she never made it to birth. Her name would have been Charlene, I was told. I always believed that Charlene now lived in me. Therefore, when I transitioned, I became Charlene. My family was also able to take comfort from the idea that they are regaining the daughter they lost," Charlene wrote.

"I have always admired the singer Christina Aguilera. She is my role model, and she inspires me when I am lost in life. Therefore, I took her name," Christina wrote.

"Rachel was my best friend in high school. She knew about me being closeted trans and was totally supportive. In turn, I was totally supportive of her plans to become an elite concert pianist. Sadly, she died in a car accident

in our first year of college. I have vowed to keep up her legacy. I took her name when I transitioned, so she can live on in a way," Rachel wrote.

As I read through the stories, something hit me. Every one of these stories are beautiful because they represent how each name came to mean something to the person, to the point where they became good enough to become a representation of the person. The same thing happened with me and my name. I didn't just decide to become a Katie overnight, after all.

Therefore, I decided that I would not use an artist name. I would just be known as Katie Greenlight, like I am known as in my everyday life. It is the name that is ME. It also fits with the idea that I am an unpretentious young woman, I guess.

Inspired by all the beautiful stories of how other trans women chose their names, I realised that beautiful little stories here and there can be just the thing needed to cheer you up sometimes. I decided to sit down and write a song about it.

[This music can be found on the companion album. The name of the track is Beauty.]

Sometimes it's just the rain

And sometimes it's just the sun

Whatever time we all need

Something to cheer us up

It may be just the night sky

Filled with little stars

But for us it can hold

More meaning than a book

We all need those little things

To remind us of what's worth living for

We all need those little things

Just to show us beauty

And in those beautiful things

We can see why life is worth living

It's just a little book

But to me it's the key

To a time when this world

Seemed like a paradise
And with it I can try to
Build the magic again
And for us love can last an eternity

We all need those moments
Just to show us what life is all about
And then we can carry on in those darker
periods
So cherish those little beautiful things
And hold onto those great moments
And live the most out of what comes our way

And when I am under a

Dark cloud and the storm

I won't be afraid if

I have those dreams with me

And we'll keep on going

Till the great moments come back

And for me the world always

Is a world of hope

We all need those moments

Just to show us what life is all about

And then we can carry on in those darker
periods

So cherish those little beautiful things

And hold onto those great moments

And live the most out of what comes our way

Chapter 4. GETTING OVER THE FEAR BARRIER

"But you're not really a woman, are you? How can you claim to speak for women?" the show host asked me.

"Well..."

I could feel my heart racing.

"Do I look like a man to you?" I suddenly said. My mind was blank, and I couldn't think of anything else.

The audience erupted into laughter.

"I don't care what you look like, you're just abnormal," a man from the front row yelled. The audience laughed more.

"Man, man, man, man, man...." some people chanted.

I could feel the embarrassment taking over me.

Then I woke up.

It was just a nightmare.

I guess the fear of public embarrassment about being trans is still very much with me. And if I am to chase my dreams, I must conquer it.

Sometimes I think it's so unfair that us trans people basically have to live in fear all the time. There's the fear of physical danger, which trans people who work in some occupations or live in rougher areas are more at risk of. Thankfully, I don't think I will end up having to work in dangerous areas at night, as I am going to college. Nor do we live in a dangerous neighbourhood. But frankly, I am still a bit

scared, to the degree that I don't go to quiet places alone, for example.

But there's another kind of fear which affects me much more in my daily functioning: fear of being discredited as a person. Fear of being seen as a freak. As I said before, in my everyday life most people either don't know that I am trans or know but won't raise it. However, there are still many times where I am meeting someone new or when I am in a situation with unfamiliar people, and I am scared if people actually know that I am trans and the issue would be raised at any minute. Frankly, it has never happened before, but I am still scared.

And then there's my inability to date. Yes, I am 18 and I have never been on a date. I have never been kissed, and I have never been 'in a relationship'. The reason? I'm scared, again. I really don't know how to handle explaining

myself and the 'trans thing' to other people, let alone a boyfriend. Like my parents, they may have never heard of what being trans is properly. I also don't know if the issue may suddenly arise, for example on our first date. I keep picturing some random guy coming up to my date, and saying 'dude you're dating a drag queen' or something like that.

Wow, I just realised that I have a lot of fear, and that fear is preventing me from living even a normal life.

Why do I fear so much? I mean, rationally there are plenty of nice and accepting people out there, right? And being trans is something that's not THAT hard to explain, right? It's probably more of a mystery than being gay or being a

geek, but it's still not totally unheard of, like having sixteen fingers, right?

After a lot of soul searching, I came to a realisation: much of the fear stems from bad experiences from the months just after I came out, my 'transition' period.

I guess coming out was a weird and difficult experience for me, and for a lot of other trans people too. We have the usual stresses about coming out - how to say it, whether the person we are telling would be accepting, and the like. But there's another complication with trans coming out: you are essentially telling the other person that the 'you' they have known through the years is not really you. Well, you are that person, except you physically want to look different. I still have the same interests, the same personality, and the same memories. But still, to most people, a different shell means a

different person. Imagine, for example, Justin Timberlake in the shell of Christina Aguilera. We don't actually change that much, but you get the idea.

In fact, coming out was an eerie experience, and something that had to be done repeatedly until everyone was told. Understandably, I would not want to revisit that part of my life again. I wish society was more ahead on its understanding of what being trans is, as then we would have a common language to talk about these things and people would understand what we mean. But society is not there yet, and probably won't be there for some time, because being trans is rare. I guess that's hard to change.

No girl wants to 'look like a man' or be identified as one in any way. In fact, I know of a case where a young woman underwent expensive plastic surgery because a stranger on

the subway thought that she was a man. But for us trans girls, being treated as a man even when we have done our best to show you otherwise is especially painful, because it is like a deliberate invalidating of our identity. Nobody likes to be told that they are not who they believe they are, trans people included. And yet, early in our transition, it often happens. We haven't adjusted our presentation style well enough yet, we may have put on our makeup in the wrong way. Either way, we end up being identified as a 'boy in a dress' sometimes. To make matters worse, people point and stare. Later on it probably doesn't happen much for most of us, but that early trauma is enough to change our perspectives forever. Psychologically, we are scared that one wrong move and we would end up back where we were.

Today, I had lunch with Jayne again. As she is such a confident person, I asked her why she appeared to have no fears.

"It's not that I have no fears, but I just don't let myself get taken over by them," she said.

"How can you do that?" I asked.

"Thinking rationally is the best way," she said.

"Think rationally about what can happen, and how bad things really may be. Think rationally about what you can do in each scenario. It's never as scary as you think."

I guess that was helpful. On deeper thinking, if I had to 'explain the trans thing' now, it would be quite different, actually. I would still be me, still have the same shell, just with a bit of a unique history. It wouldn't be the same experience as 'coming out' the first time. I still can't prevent people from thinking of me as a freak

afterwards, but for many people, it would probably be no big deal. And I don't have to be liked by everyone.

And the other thing - I don't look like a boy enough to get mistaken for one anymore. I really should put that fear away.

Chapter 5. A PROBLEM OF IMAGE

One way of having a music career is to get a record label to sign you up and get them to release your material. In fact, it's probably the only way to have a 'big career' in music. So I thought I would explore that idea a bit.

Over the past week I have been reading a lot of 'advice' on how to put together a demo package for record companies. I don't know how good the advice is, so I am basically taking a stab in the dark. But I'll follow their advice, as I have no better place to start. From what I've read, the CD in the package had to have three to four songs, to show them what you are about musically. I have already recorded two, so I'm well on my way to filling the quota. But it's not just about the music. The package also has to tell a story about who you are, as a person.

There will need to be a brief bio along with photos.

Luckily, unlike most other people of the same age, I think I know who I am quite well. All that introspection that comes with the process of preparing to come out and the long process of redeploying your persona in a new shell will teach you a lot about that. Basically, I am the girl next door. I am not weird or 'edgy' in any way. I am also a low maintenance person, and I like how that means I am not stressed out about how I appear all the time. I don't even care about fashion that much. Another thing is, I love my family. Our relationship was tested during my coming out and early transition, but now it's stronger than ever. I am especially close to my mom. I think I should put that down too, as it's an important part of who I am.

Should I say that I am trans? Probably not. I am worried that people will see me in a particular way. Out there in the big world, there are a few trans stereotypes. And here's how I relate to them:

The first stereotype is that trans people behave in an 'over the top' manner, almost like a full time drag queen, complete with heavy makeup, big, fancy dresses and the most drama queen type behaviour. I personally would never dress that way, and I really can't stand drama queens either.

The second stereotype is that trans people live an anti-traditional life, and have very unconventional values. This is simply not true of me. I love my family, I don't drink alcohol, smoke, or take recreational drugs. I have also taken a pledge to remain a virgin until my marriage. I totally respect people who don't

make the same choices in life as I do, but this is who I am.

The final stereotype is that trans people are simply weird. Well, I am not weird, and I don't want to be weird. I have nothing against people who choose to be weird, but that simply isn't me.

Understandably, I would never want my management putting me into any of these three boxes. I have decided: the trans thing will not be mentioned.

And I am definitely not paranoid about trans people being boxed into stereotypes by the world out there. Even friends do it. Once a friend told me that I was 'too conservative to be trans', after I told her about my past. I guess they meant the way I live my life, seeing that I

am actually a liberal politically. Another friend, after seeing an interview with Laverne Cox online, asked me why I wasn't more like her, i.e. more willing to talk about my trans identity.

Now I am having second thoughts about whether to say I am trans up front. I guess it's a dilemma trans people often have at job interviews. In a way, a demo package is like a job application too, so I guess my situation is not unique. It's just one more big hurdle that trans people have to go through in life, unfortunately.

Anyway, the reason I am having second thoughts is that I'm scared if I am not upfront about it, the trans issue may pop up unexpectedly somewhere down the line, and it

won't be pretty. I have seen far too many media articles outing trans people, using offensive terms like 'sex change' and 'sex swap', to be able to imagine that it would be any different for me. By the way, it's just sad how even supposedly gay-friendly celebrities use terms like 'sex change' casually all the time.

Maybe I should say that I am trans upfront, after all.

All the thinking about my image, who I am, and what I should do about it has inspired me to write another song.

[This music can be found on the companion album. The name of the track is Listen To My Heart]

What they tell you is just so confusing
Sometimes you don't know what to do
And in this world there are so many crossroads
Which path should I go down

I'll just listen to my heart
Live by doing what feels right
What really makes my life better
Should be the way to go
There are many stupid rules
But they don't do any good
Why should we be bothered with them

When we should know better

Sometimes I wonder why some cling onto

Walls that only make

Their own lives harder than how it should be

Let them go and we'll have freedom

I'll just listen to my heart

Live by doing what feels right

What really makes my life better

Should be the way to go

There are many stupid rules

But they don't do any good

Why should we be bothered with them

When we should know better

Time resolves all things

But at what cost

For me, will it be too late

Have you asked

I'll just listen to my heart

Live by doing what feels right

What really makes my life better

Should be the way to go

There are many stupid rules

But they don't do any good

Why should we be bothered with them

When we should know better

Chapter 6. THE OPTION OF STEALTH

So I may have to choose between saying that I am trans upfront, or risk the issue being blown out of proportions by the media at unexpected times in the future. But is there a third choice? Maybe there is, if I can pull off living in stealth.

Stealth is the term that describes when a trans person lives a life where their trans history is kept secret. In 'normal' stealth usually only family members and romantic partners know, in 'deep' stealth even romantic partners may be kept in the dark. Stealth is thought to be more common in decades past, especially because the world was quite unaccepting of trans people back then. Today, stealth is much harder too, in a world where digging up people's past has become much easier thanks to the internet.

Like most trans people, I am not 'stealth', by definition, as plenty of my friends do know of my history. Instead, I am 'woodworked', a life where the trans thing doesn't stick out as an issue. Obviously, if I became a public figure, this woodworking would become meaningless, as my trans history is common knowledge amongst some circles and can be exposed easily.

But what if I start going stealth? Then I would have the freedom to pursue my dreams AND not have to worry about trans stereotyping. Should I do it? How will my life change?

Today I raised the issue of stealth with Jayne.

"What would you think if I start living in stealth?" I asked her.

She paused to think for a while.

"You should have your freedom to do whatever you want with your life. But living a secret isn't a great life, is it?" she said.

I thought about it for a bit.

"What's so bad about living a secret, anyway?" I asked, trying to dig deeper.

"I guess it's about being inauthentic. It's hard to upkeep. There's also going to be a lot of psychological stress, fearing if people know about it or not," she said. "I know all about it because my moms told me all about it. Being a lesbian in a small town in the 1980s was really tough, you know."

That got me thinking. Gay and lesbian people have fought so hard and long for the right not to live in the closet, because being forced into the closet can cause major psychological stress. Now that they don't need to hide anymore, it's much healthier. The pain of living as a gay person who had to hide who they are is real, and if it were me, I'm not sure I could bear it psychologically.

But isn't stealth more or less the same thing? Could I handle the psychological stress? Honestly, I don't think so. I will think more about the issue, however.

It's hard to know how stealth lives are like, because by definition trans people in stealth don't tell their stories.

Except now we occasionally can know. Because we have the internet, there is now a place where people living in stealth can tell their stories. Granted this still infrequently happens, because stealth people fear even the tiniest risk of being 'outed'. But there are definitely some stories to read on stealth out there. So I searched.

The first story I came across was told under the pseudonym of Cheryl. Cheryl paid a heavy price to live in stealth. She had to move to a new town and cut off all her previous friends. She even destroyed all old photos of herself, in case they might be picked up by someone. She has also invented a past for herself to cover up her real history. But she thinks it was all worth it, because she finally has the freedom to be herself without the baggage of the past.

Diana, again a pseudonym, also had something to say about stealth. She offered some unexpected insight into stealth. "Living in stealth is like living in a quiet country town in retirement. In today's world, it's possible to live in stealth, but you must be very careful. It's easier when you have a limited social circle," she said.

Cutting off my friends, even destroying memories of my past? I don't think I can do that. And living in the way described by Diana would prevent me from chasing my dreams. So I have decided: stealth is definitely not for me. Case closed.

Chapter 7. TRANSACTIVISM

So I'm not going to care about stealth anymore. I am just going to accept that part of what people are going to know about me, is that I am trans.

But should I have anything to say about being trans?

Today I asked Jayne, and she thought it would be a good thing to do.

"We should all be proud of who we are, and the path we have travelled in life. Or else, we would be wasting a chance to use our voice to inform the world a bit more. As for myself, I make sure all my friends know that I was raised by two loving moms, for example. It's a beautiful thing to share," she said.

But of course, being trans is a much more complicated matter than being raised by two moms. There's a lot of 'politics' around being trans. And it's not just from the haters. It's from within the trans community itself too. I don't think I can really identify with all that.

Sometimes I'm also scared that if I say the wrong thing about being trans, I would end up being caught up in trans politics. For example, there was this time when I posted on a forum to tell my trans growing up story, in response to a visitor asking about 'what being transgender means'. To my surprise, the next day when I revisited the forum, my thread had been swamped by posts from other trans women. Some of them complained that my story was not really 'what being trans was about', and was not representative of all trans women. Well, I never said it was going to be able to capture every trans female experience, as it was just my own story anyway. Then there was a fight

between several trans women who liked boys, and two or three trans women who liked girls, about who was the more 'authentic type' of trans woman. One post even complained about my wish to be a princess when I was younger, saying that 'not all trans women like to be princesses' and that 'this kind of stereotype is limiting because it invalidates other trans women'. Hello? I was never out to set a stereotype for anyone. I didn't know just by telling my story I would get sucked into a storm of trans politics.

I really don't care about trans politics, except getting anti discrimination protections in law, okay? Unfortunately, I have been told that it's not OK either. Sometimes, even by saying that you don't care, you will get labelled a traitor. For example, there was this debate about whether a gay drag queen could use the word 'tranny'. I really don't care, to be honest. He can say whatever he wants, as long as he isn't being

mean. But apparently if I respect his freedom of speech I am not standing up for the community. Whatever that means. One of the reasons I stopped visiting some trans forums was to avoid this crap. Some other trans people I know feel this way too.

The truth is, trans people come from diverse life paths, and have diverse life experiences. There is no 'one trans narrative'. Some trans women are quite feminine, like myself. Others may not be. Some like guys, and some like girls. Some are feminists, some are not. Some are political about being trans, some are not. As a result, we also have different beliefs about various things. For example, I am all for liberty and I strongly support freedom of speech as long as it's not deliberately insulting or threatening, but some trans women may be more into weeding out 'offensive' language out there. We need to accept and embrace each other. Unfortunately, sometimes the 'community' likes to tear itself

apart because of these differences. Which I think does not help anyone in the end.

And then there are also some trans people who have what I think is a very negative view of the world out there. Sure, as trans people we get discriminated against all the time, and that needs to change. But we aren't going to get any sympathy if we start saying that 99.9% of the world have 'cis privilege' that they should check ('cis' is short for 'cisgender' which means not trans). The truth is, whilst there are a few bad people out there, most people out there aren't out to get us. Whilst the system out there may not be perfect, it is not 'designed to oppress us' in any way either, if you live in the West. However, if I just say these things as a trans person public figure, I'm scared that will already 'offend' enough people.

So I am not going to say much about being trans. The resulting politics would take away from what I have to say anyway. Instead, by being a trans person living a normal life, chasing her dreams and being positive about life, I think I will be making the best statement I can make.

Chapter 8. MY (TEMPORARY) SOLUTION

It's been a year and I still haven't sent that demo package. I guess I am not ready to put a label on what I actually am, as yet. Presenting yourself to the outside world and getting the message right is a difficult art. More so if you are trans.

I guess I am taking the long road. One day I will be ready to get the world to listen to my story, my music and my philosophy of life. Until then, I will continue updating my website, writing and recording new songs to release there, and write and share ideas I have about this thing called life.

Being trans has meant that I don't have the confidence to do certain things in life as if I

weren't trans. But it also means that I have some unique experiences, some stories that only I can tell, some things that I can write about in my music and my books. And I think that's a fair tradeoff.

Dreams are for the long term in life anyway, and right now I am just living life day by day, and seeing what happens along the way. I guess a lot of trans people live this way too. In a life with such unique challenges, I guess it's a good philosophy to have.

Finally, before I go, can I just share with you my latest song? It will inspire you on the long journey ahead, I promise.

[This music can be found on the companion album. The name of the track is When The World Doesn't Know You're Special]

You stood in the crowd today
Amongst so many faces, nobody could see you
You felt so, small as if, you don't exist
Even if you yelled nobody would hear
Days like these are never easy
We don't deserve to be forgotten

When The World Doesn't Know You are Special
Just remember, that I know
And remember, they can't take that a-way
When The World Doesn't Know You're Even
There
Just remember it's their loss
And remember, the doubters aren't worth your
time

Cause the World Goes Mad Sometimes
Though that doesn't change who you are
And whatever they tell you
It can't change the fact that you're special to
someone

Your work's in the pile, right now
Amongst many other things, will they even, see
it?

You feel so, small as if, you don't exist
Even if you yelled nobody would hear
Days like these a-re never easy
We don't deserve to be forgotten

When The World Doesn't Know You're Special

Just remember, that I know

And remember, they can't take that a-way

When The World Doesn't Know You're Even
There

Just remember it's their loss

And remember, the doubters aren't worth your
time

Cause the World Goes Mad Sometimes

Though that doesn't change who you are

And whatever they tell you

It can't change the fact that you're special to
someone